

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O 231205Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7232
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 1576

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MOPS, SY, LE, IS
SUBJ: ME STAFF GROUP: SOUTH LEBANON: DISCUSSIONS WITH PRIME
MINISTER HOSS AND FRENCH AMBASSADOR ARGOD

1. SUMMARY. ARRIVAL IRANIAN AND FRENCH TROOPS HAS GIVEN
IMPORTANT BOOST TO LOCAL MORALE. PRIMIN CONSIDERABLY LESS
GLOOMY THAN HE WAS LAST SUNDAY AND FEELS SYRIANS MAY
COME AROUND AND BE MORE HELPFUL WHEN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL IS
UNDER WAY OR COMPLETED. FRENCH AMBASSADOR HAS SEEN ARAFAT
WHO QUESTIONED ENTRY OF FRENCH TROOPS INTO TYRE AS PROPOSED
BY UNIFIL. ARAFAT ALSO CLAIMS TO CONTROL AREA AROUND
HASBAYA AND HAS RAISED SAME QUESTION REGARDING ENTRY UNIFIL
TROOPS THERE. TYRE REGION IN PARTICULAR IS GOING TO BE

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DELICATE PROBLEM TO SOLVE. MEANWHILE, FIRST CONTINGENT
FRENCH TROOPS IS STILL AT BEIRUT AIRPORT.

2. HAD USEFUL DISCUSSION WITH PRIME MINISTER HOSS ON SITUATION
IN SOUTH LEBANON FOLLOWING SIGNING OF PL480 WHEAT AGREEMENT
MORNING MARCH 23. HOSS IS IN MUCH BETTER SPIRITS THAN HE WAS
WHEN I SAW HIM LAST SUNDAY. HE SAID EVERYONE'S MORALE

RECEIVED A TREMENDOUS BOOST WITH ARRIVAL BEIRUT FIRST CONTINGENT FRENCH TROOPS THIS MORNING AS WELL AS BY ARRIVAL IRANIAN CONTINGENT IN SOUTH. HE THOUGHT THINGS WERE BEGINNING TO MOVE.

3. I SAID WE TOO WERE ENCOURAGED BY WAY UNIFIL OPERATION SEEMED TO BE TAKING SHAPE BUT THERE WERE SOME QUESTION MARKS REMAINING, BIGGEST OF WHICH WAS ATTITUDE OF PLO. WHAT COULD HE TELL ME IN THAT REGARD? HOSS SAID HE HAD BEEN USING SAUDI AMBASSADOR AS INTERMEDIARY, ASKING HIM TO PUT MAXIMUM SAUDI PRESSURE ON PLO TO COOPERATE WITH CEASEFIRE. HE HIMSELF HAD ALSO BEEN IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH ARAFAT OR HANI HASSAN EVERY DAY. HE THOUGHT PLO WOULD COOPERATE BUT THERE WAS PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM BECAUSE THERE HAD BEEN NO DIRECT CONTACT WITH ARAFAT FROM UN SIDE. HE HAD THEREFORE BEEN VERY PLEASED TO HEAR THAT WALDHEIM HAD GIVEN PLO REPRESENTATIVE IN NEW YORK, TARAZI, MESSAGE FOR ARAFAT. HE THOUGHT THIS MESSAGE MIGHT IMPROVE PLO ATTITUDE. (WHILE PRESS REPORTS THERE WAS SUCH A MESSAGE FOR TARAZI TO TRANSMIT TO PLO LEADERSHIP, AS OF LAST NIGHT PLO DENIED HAVING RECEIVED IT.)

4. I SAID I UNDERSTOOD SYRIANS HAD NOT BEEN VERY FORTHCOMING DURING MARCH 21 CONVERSATIONS IN DAMASCUS WITH REGARD TO QUESTION OF AREA BETWEEN LITANI AND ZAHRANI AND WITH REGARD TO CONVOYS. REGARDING FIRST QUESTION, WE HAD NOW HEARD FROM ISRAELIS, CONTRARY TO OUR EARLIER IMPRESSION, THAT
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THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT PRESENCE OF ADF IN THAT ZONE. I THOUGHT THIS WOULD PERHAPS BECOME NEGOTIABLE ONCE UNIFIL WAS IN PLACE AND WITHDRAWAL HAD BEGUN OR PERHAPS WHEN WITHDRAWAL WAS COMPLETED. DID HE THINK THERE WAS ANY POSSIBILITY OF A CHANGE IN SYRIAN ATTITUDE?

5. HOSS SAID SYRIANS HAD MADE IT CLEAR THEY WOULD NOT MOVE INTO AREA "FOR THE PRESENT". THEY HAD INDICATED THAT ONCE WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELIS HAD OCCURRED THEY WOULD BE MORE INTERESTED IN IDEA. THEY COULD NOT MOVE IN AT THIS TIME BECAUSE IT WOULD LOOK LIKE AN ANTI-PALESTINIAN ACTION. I SAID PERHAPS THE FACT THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE NOW NEGATIVE WOULD ALLOW SYRIANS TO ALLEGE IT WAS AN ANTI-ISRAELI ACTION. HOSS SAID HE WOULD PREFER FOR THEM TO CALL IT A PRO-LEBANESE STEP. WITH REGARD TO CONVOYS, HOSS SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE CHANGE IN SYRIAN ATTITUDE ONCE WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELIS HAD TAKEN PLACE OR ONCE A SERIOUS BEGINNING HAD BEEN MADE IN THAT DIRECTION. SYRIANS COULD NOT SHUT OFF SUPPLIES AT THIS POINT AND HE THOUGHT THEIR POSITION WAS UNDERSTANDABLE.

6. WE ALSO DISCUSSED BRIEFLY NEED FOR ECONOMIC AND

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH LEBANON AND WE BOTH AGREED THAT IF SOMETHING DRAMATIC WAS NOT DONE IN THIS RESPECT THERE WOULD BE MORE AND WORSE PROBLEMS IN THE SOUTH. AID REP IRVIN AND I HAD MENTIONED TO HIM EARLIER THAT WE WOULD EXPECT TO HAVE SOME ADDITIONAL FUNDS AVAILABLE WHICH MIGHT BE USED IN RECONSTRUCTION DEVASTATED HOUSING IN THE SOUTH. HE THOUGHT THAT WOULD BE QUITE USEFUL.

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EXDIS

7. SUBSEQUENTLY CALLED ON FRENCH AMBASSADOR ARGOD TO CONGRATULATE HIM ON HIS GOVERNMENT'S SENDING TROOPS WHICH HAD GIVEN SUCH A LIFT TO EVERYONE'S SPIRITS. QUESTION IN MY MIND, HOWEVER, WAS ATTITUDE OF PLO, AND I UNDERSTOOD HE HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THEM. WHAT COULD HE TELL ME?

8. ARGOD SAID HE HAD SEEN ARAFAT LAST NIGHT AND THAT LATTER HAD PUFFED HIMSELF UP AND BLUSTERED AND SAID UN APPARENTLY HAD IN MIND SENDING TROOPS INTO AREAS OCCUPIED BY PLO. PLO WAS SOLE ORGANIZATION IN LEBANON WHICH HAD FOUGHT, AND IT WAS DEFENDING LEBANESE TERRITORY AGAINST ISRAEL.

PLO HAD HELD FOR EIGHT DAYS AND STILL CONTROLLED TYRE AND
SURROUNDING AREAS PLUS HASBAYA REGION. IT WAS NOT
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GOING TO GIVE THESE UP TO THE UN. UNIFIL WAS SUPPOSED TO
MOVE AGAINST ISRAEL, NOT AGAINST PALESTINIANS. THEREFORE
HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY THERE WAS TALK OF THE FRENCH
ENTERING TYRE.

9. ARGOD HAD REPLIED THAT UN TROOPS WERE NOT COMING
IN AGAINST ANYBODY BUT WERE COMING FOR LEBANON. THEY WERE TO
CARRY OUT TWO MISSIONS - ONE WAS TO SUPERVISE WITHDRAWAL
OF ISRAELIS, SOMETHING WHICH HE ASSUMED ARAFAT WELCOMED,
AND THE OTHER WAS TO HELP LEBANESE GOVT REASSERT ITS
SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AREA, SOMETHING ELSE WHICH ARAFAT WAS
ON PUBLIC RECORD AS SUPPORTING. ARAFAT HAD SAID THAT WAS
ALL VERY WELL, BUT UNIFIL COULD NOT PLAY THE SORT OF ROLE UN
TROOPS HAD PLAYED IN KOREA.

10. ARGOD NOTED TO ME THAT DISPOSITION OF FRENCH TROOPS WAS NOT
IN HANDS OF UNIFIL AND NOT FRENCH GOVT. QUESTION
OF THEIR MISSION AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION WAS SOMETHING
THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE WORKED OUT VERY CAREFULLY. FIRST
GROUP OF 212 MEN WERE NOW AT AIRPORT AND WERE REMAINING IN
LEBANESE ARMY INSTALLATIONS THERE UNTIL ARRIVAL OF ANOTHER
400 MEN AND FINAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THEIR MOVEMENT TO THE
SOUTH COULD BE MADE. THERE WOULD ALSO BE A SHIP ARRIVING
WITH TRANSPORT AND APC'S IN ABOUT A WEEK. WHILE THE UNIT
WOULD NOT HAVE ALL ITS EQUIPMENT BEFORE THAT TIME, THE ONE
COMPANY NOW ON THE GROUND COULD MOVE OUT IMMEDIATELY
PROVIDING DETAILS HAD BEEN WORKED OUT. HE COMMENTED THAT
ALTHOUGH HE THOUGHT MUCH OF WHAT ARAFAT WAS SAYING WAS
BLUSTER AND FONMIN BOUTROS WAS TELLING HIM TO DISREGARD IT,
A SINGLE PALESTINIAN WITH AN ANTI-TANK ROCKET COULD CAUSE
SERIOUS FRENCH CASUALTIES AND UNIFIL HAD ITS JOB CUT OUT
FOR IT IN ASSURING PLO COOPERATION. HE DID NOT THINK
SIILASVUO OR ERSKINE HAD AUTHORITY AT THIS POINT TO BE

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IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH ARAFAT BUT HE THOUGHT IT WAS
IMPORTANT THAT THEY HAVE IT, BECAUSE ARAFAT
WAS TAKING THE POSITION THAT THE PLO WAS NOT A PARTY TO
THE RESOLUTION. IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT HIS
EGO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION. IN THAT RESPECT, MESSAGE
FROM WALDHEIM SHOULD ALSO BE HELPFUL.

11. FURTHER TO ABOVE, SAMIR SABBAGH, AN OFFICIAL OF AL MURABITUN (WHICH HAS PEOPLE FIGHTING IN SOUTH WITH PALESTINIANS), TOLD EMBOFF ON MARCH 23 THAT YASIR ARAFAT HAD ISSUED ORDERS THAT THE FRENCH PARATROOPERS IN BEIRUT SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO ENTER SOUTH LEBANON AND THAT THE PLO WOULD CONTINUE FIGHTING UNLESS UNIFIL WERE STATIONED ALONG THE BORDER BETWEEN ISRAEL AND LEBANON. ARAFAT REPORTEDLY ADDED THAT IF THIS CONDITION WERE MET, PLO COULD ACCEPT UN FORCES STATIONED ALONG THE BRIDGES OVER THE LITANI AS WELL, BUT AT NO OTHER LOCATIONS. SABBAGH ALSO SAID THA THE JOINT FORCES (PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS) WOULD NOT ACCEPT DEPLOYMENT OF THE LEBANESE ARMY SOUTH, BECAUSE IT WOULD ACTUALLY BE A MARONITE FORCE AND NOT A NATIONAL ONE.

12. COMMENT: SUPERFICIALLY, SITUATION LOOKS BRIGHTER TODAY THAN IT DID YESTERDAY ALTHOUGH NOTHING HAS CHANGED VERY MUCH. ARAFAT'S ATTITUDE IS TROUBLING, PARTICULARLY GIVEN REPORT OF ARRIVALS LARGE NUMBERS OF VOLUNTEERS IN SOUTHEN BEKAA (SEPTTEL). QUESTIONS OF TYRE AND HASBAYA REMAIN VERY DELICATE. IT IS GOING TO TAKE CONSIDERABLE DIPLOMATIC SKILL ON PART OF SIILASVUO AND ERSKINE TO GET PLO TO ALLOW UNIFIL INTO THOSE AREAS WITHOUT RESISTANCE. PARKER

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